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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses New Jersey's unprecedented $12.3 billion school construction and reconstruction project, launched in 2000, as an opportunity to reconstruct the state's communities, enhancing quality of life and reducing sprawl. It aims to stimulate a statewide conversation about the opportunity to integrate the design of the next generation of public school facilities with the state's blueprint for smart growth--the "State Development and Redevelopment Plan," or the State Plan. The paper discusses the historical background, schools as centers of community for cities and towns, state agencies' roles, and the relevance of national design policy. It then provides design guidelines for creating schools that serve as centers of New Jersey communities: (1) enhance teaching and learning and accommodate the needs of all learners; (2) serve as centers of community; (3) result from a planning/design process involving all stakeholders; (4) provide for health, safety, and security; (5) make effective use of all available resources; and (6) allow for flexibility and adaptability to changing needs. The paper also includes sections discussing the example of Paterson, New Jersey, and key components of sustainable school design. (Contains a list of resources.) (EV)

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Way to grow.

Creating Communities of Learning

Schools and Smart Growth in New Jersey

The largest school construction and reconstruction initiative in the history of New Jersey—and the most ambitious school-building initiative in the nation—creates an unprecedented and exciting opportunity to more fully integrate bricks and mortar into the fabric of communities.

"The goal of our School Construction Initiative is to provide every child in New Jersey with a world-class education in a world-class school," says Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco.

His predecessor, Christine Todd Whitman, officially launched this $12.3 billion effort when she signed into law the Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act on July 18, 2000.

The law authorized the sale of $8.6 billion in bonds to pay for construction and reconstruction of schools throughout New Jersey. The remainder is to be paid by local districts and annual appropriations of the state Legislature.

This law fundamentally restructures the way in which school facilities projects are planned, managed and financed.

Among other things, the school-funding law creates a new opportunity for municipal involvement in schools facilities planning, which did not exist before. It brings municipal planning boards into the decision-making process by requiring school districts to file their long-range facilities plans with local planning boards.

This landmark school-construction effort presents an opportunity to completely rethink how our state provides learning to its residents—not just the 1.3 million children in New Jersey's elementary and secondary schools, but adults in continuing education programs.

It presents a historic opportunity to reconstruct our communities, particularly our cities and towns, consistent with the letter and spirit of the *New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan.*

While the primary focus of the legislation is on school construction in our cities and towns, the opportunity exists to rethink the function, design and locations of our suburban and even rural learning facilities.

Creating schools as centers of community is important throughout New Jersey and can go a long way towards enhancing community quality of life and reducing sprawl.

In November 2000, the National Trust of Historic Preservation released a report, *Historic Schools in the Age of Sprawl: Why Johnny Can't Walk to School.* It quotes W. Cecil Stewart, dean of the University of Nebraska's College of Architecture, as saying, "The public school system is the most

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influential planning entity, public or private, promoting the sprawl pattern of development in the United States."

Stewart further describes school districts as "advance scouts for sprawl."

The big issue raised by this school construction and reconstruction effort—in our cities and towns, suburbs and rural communities—isn't just how to build better or more cost-effective school buildings, but on how to build better, more livable communities for people in New Jersey while enhancing the education of every child in New Jersey.

There is a limited window of opportunity to come up with a vision for new schools that serve as centers for New Jersey communities. In a few years, it will be too late to leverage the investment in schools through smarter, more efficient, integrated resource development.

Unquestionably, the need for investment and for innovative planning and design is greatest in New Jersey's urban communities. The pay-off of such an investment is too great to ignore—nothing less than community renewal that is centered on neighborhood schools.

This publication aims to stimulate a statewide conversation about the exciting opportunity to integrate the design of the next generation of public school facilities with the state's blueprint for smart growth—the *State Development and Redevelopment Plan*, or the State Plan.

To be "smart," in some contexts, means to look at the big picture. When we forge a new vision of public schools for the 21st century and how they might fit into New Jersey communities, we will deepen the understanding that must inform the actual design of our public works.

Already, several New Jersey communities, including Paterson, Hoboken, Plainfield and Newark, are seizing the opportunity presented by the schools construction program in different and exciting ways.

These middle school students are participating in the Paterson Design Arts Academy that is housed in what was a vacant, second-story downtown mall. They are working on models for renovations and additions to one of the local schools.

Historical Background

The state's unprecedented schools construction initiative has its origins in the New Jersey Supreme Court's rulings in the *Abbott v. Burke* case.

The *Abbott* cases all involve interpretations of the New Jersey Constitution that each child between the ages of 5 and 21 is entitled to a "thorough and efficient" education. (The state's compulsory education law, however, requires students to attend school from ages 6 to 16.)

As a result of these cases, 30 of the 618 school districts in New Jersey have come to be known as the "special needs districts," or "*Abbott* districts."

Twenty-eight of these districts were deemed by the state Supreme Court as disadvantaged based on a variety of socioeconomic characteristics including the local property tax base. The court found these districts had special problems with facilities and programs and ruled that the state should make up the difference to allow them to spend on a per-pupil basis at the same level as the most affluent districts in New Jersey.

Two other districts, Plainfield and Neptune, were added by the Legislature.

The state's highest court directed the state to provide facilities "that will be sufficient to enable these students to achieve the substantive standards that now define a thorough and efficient education."

Furthermore, the court wrote," ... the quality of the facilities cannot depend on the district's willingness or ability to raise taxes or to incur debt."

After nearly two years of debate, the Legislature passed a bill that provides for an expanded schools construction program—including aid of at least 40 percent of eligible costs—which goes beyond helping the *Abbott* districts and includes aid for all 618 districts in the state.

The *Abbott* decision directed the state to provide full funding of the costs to repair or replace deteriorated, over-crowded schools in the 30 "special needs districts," which are primarily urban.

While there is an urgent need to respond to the *Abbott* ruling and address critical health and safety concerns, it is essential to take time to plan, in order to ensure that an inclusive process for community involvement both informs and influences all school-facilities decision making.

This school-construction program will have enormous impact on the state's future physical and social landscape. An examination of the choices this program might engage is crucial to such an enormous public effort.

In addition to the construction program, the court mandated the 30 *Abbott* districts to implement a state Department of Education-approved "whole school reform" (WSR) model in all elementary schools in the *Abbott* districts.

Whole school reform involves a systematic restructuring of an entire school involving the participation of the school's faculty, administration, students, parents and other community stakeholders which "must be implemented as interrelated parts of a comprehensive program," according to the education department.

Abbott or 'Special Needs' Districts

County	Municipality
Atlantic	Pleasantville
Bergen	Garfield
Burlington	Burlington
	Pemberton
Camden	Camden City
	Gloucester City
Cumberland	Bridgeton
	Millville
	Vineland
Essex	East Orange
	Irvington
	Newark
	Orange
Hudson	Harrison
	Hoboken
	Jersey City
	Union City
	West New York
Mercer	Trenton
Middlesex	New Brunswick
	Perth Amboy
Monmouth	Asbury Park
	Keansburg
	Long Branch
	Neptune
Passaic	Passaic City
	Paterson
Union	Elizabeth
	Plainfield
Warren	Phillipsburg

This article spotlights a concept that is closely aligned with the "whole school" approach—the concept of planning and designing community-based schools.

Examples of this abound, as there is a growing movement in municipalities throughout New Jersey and nationwide, based on the understanding that it is "smart" to plan and design schools to serve as centers of communities.

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Center of a Community

There are two ways a school can serve as a center of community.

First, a school can play a more integral role within the context of the whole community. For instance, school multi-purpose facilities can provide safe, nurturing environments in which children learn, and can also provide a variety of services—libraries, health clinics, arts centers, housing—from which the entire community can benefit.

Second, the learning environment can expand to take advantage of the full range of the community's resources—for example, by locating a specialized health services vocational academy in a hospital, or a performing arts program in a theater. Other possibilities include anything from a learning facility linked to a high-tech business or a civics program housed in a city or county building.

Either way, the community-based school model represents a crucial strategy for achieving the goals of the State Plan.

In short, the State Plan encourages the revitalization of New Jersey's cities and towns and promotes more compact forms of new growth and the preservation of precious natural resources including open space and farmland.

The State Plan is a blueprint for smart growth. It seeks to curb sprawl, a disconnected pattern of development that consumes land at a voracious rate and forces people to drive in their cars to carry out most functions of daily life.

This is in sharp contrast to a tight-knit, compact community

The location and design of our learning facilities is central to achieving the goals of the *New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan.*

The State Plan, the blueprint for smart growth, contains three core ideas. They are:

- Maintain and revitalize our existing cities and towns.
- Organize new growth in centers—compact, mixed-use communities where people can live, work, shop, play and find a variety of choices—in housing, in transportation and in access to jobs.
- Protect our farmland and natural and historic resources.

The State Plan goals that are particularly achieved through the location and design of schools are:

- Revitalize our cities and towns
- Provide adequate public facilities and services at a reasonable cost
- Promote beneficial economic growth, development and renewal for all residents of New Jersey
- Protect the environment, prevent and clean up pollution
- Conserve the state's natural resources and systems
- Preserve and enhance areas with historic, cultural, scenic, open space and recreational value
- School facilities located as centers of community strengthen neighborhoods in New Jersey's cities and towns and create a focal point for both suburban and rural communities.

Thus school facilities, located and designed with community input, provide an unparalleled opportunity to achieve the outcomes envisioned in the State Plan.

Designing schools to incorporate a mix of educational and non-educational functions is a more efficient way to provide public facilities and services. Schools designed, built and operated as high performance facilities minimizing the use of energy, land and water and conserve natural resources.

Most importantly, beautifully designed, healthy facilities, located to support community economic development and providing greater support for students to learn, are a necessary component of the State Plan's strategy for the revitalization of our cities and towns.

For more information about the State Plan, see the Office of State Planning web site at www.njstateplan.com or call 609-292-7156.

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where people can meet most of their daily needs in a short, walkable distance—in essence, a neighborhood.

The court-ordered remedy addresses the urgent need for the modernization of school facilities in the 30 *Abbott* districts. At the same time, the need for expediency in completing top-priority repairs to address critical health and safety issues does not preclude the need for planning the more comprehensive school reform and improvement projects proposed as part of the five-year, Long-range Facilities Plan.

Each district was required to submit such a plan to the state education commissioner in December 2000.

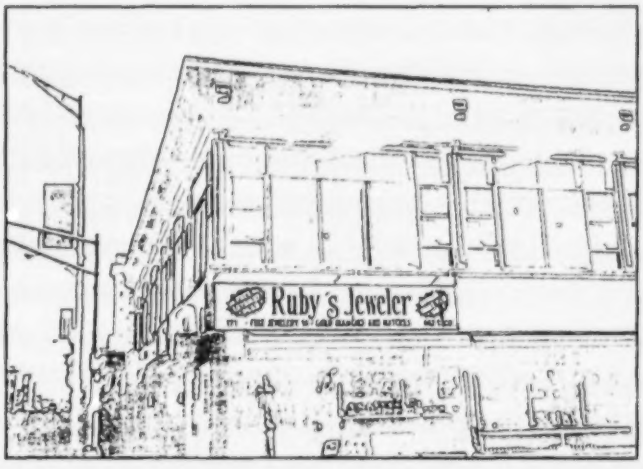
Opportunity for Cities and Towns

Many cities and older suburban towns in New Jersey are currently enjoying a renaissance, thanks to sustained growth of the national economies as well as state policy and programs and local leadership.

However, it has not been so easy to reverse the fortunes of the most distressed urban neighborhoods in the state—including the *Abbott* districts, which are characterized by concentrated poverty and the loss of investment.

Moreover, the scarcity of available land presents special challenges for urban areas.

With school funding based largely on property taxes and a desire of municipal leaders to stabilize or reduce local taxes by attracting commercial ratables, sometimes the choice is between a tax-generating private development and a public school use on a particular city corner. Municipal officials are sometimes reluctant to give up a ratable.



This vacant second-story space in downtown Perth Amboy is suitable for housing educational programs.

And, urban areas do not have the option of sprawling low-density, single-story school buildings that consume open lands, as has happened in many rapidly suburbanizing communities in New Jersey.

Yet timing is everything. The coincidence of the schools construction program with the urban renaissance offers a truly unique window of opportunity to capitalize on the inherent strength of cities and towns as a resource to improve the effectiveness of urban schools.

With proper planning, the new and improved *Abbott* schools can serve as a catalyst for the revitalization of these neighborhoods, leveraging urban economic development in areas that have been left behind by boom times.

Thus, while the *Abbott* legislation will benefit all of the school districts in the state, both ratable-rich and ratable-poor, it is crucial for the conversation about how to leverage the state's investment in schools to focus on the impoverished districts, which are primarily, but not exclusively, urban.

State Agencies' Roles

Fortunately, there is sufficient time to think broadly about the next generation of New Jersey schools.

Construction will get under way this year and take 10 years to complete, according to Caren Franzini, Executive Director of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority.

The authority is responsible for the design and management of school construction in all districts receiving state funding for 55 percent or more of eligible costs, and may serve as the manager of school design and construction for any school district that requests the authority to do so.

While the state Department of Education's "facilities efficiency standards" set limits on uses of *Abbott* funds, the EDA has already made clear its support for any school district in New Jersey that desires to pursue a broader vision for its facilities grounded in a community-based design.

In undertaking this step, it is important to be both visionary and pragmatic.

The Department of Education has set "facilities efficiency standards" to determine the extent to which a district's construction project qualifies for state aid. These are not construction design standards.

According to the department, they "represent the instructional and administrative spaces that are educationally adequate to support the achievement of the State's Core Curriculum Content Standards." The Supreme Court accepted core curriculum standards "as the definition of what students need to learn as the result of the 'thorough and efficient education' that...(the) State Constitution promises them."

A district may design other spaces to be included in the project and the EDA will assist in the search for funding necessary to cover the cost of those design elements.

To contribute to school reform and community revitalization, however, bricks and mortar projects must embody a vision for change cultivated through community partnerships, and form part of an integrated solution to local environmental, social and economic concerns.

Learning a New Approach

Significantly, the biggest obstacle to building urban schools that can serve as a catalyst for community revitalization may not be the obvious targets, such as red tape or lack of money. Rather, it may be the complexity of mobilizing the resources—social, cultural, economic and political—required for comprehensive improvement projects, in which schools collaborate with their communities and beyond.

It may be necessary to build the capacity of school administrators, school board members, and state and local officials to carry out the kind of strategic planning and visioning activities to design a community collaboration and to develop and strengthen partnerships with colleges, parents, businesses and other schools.

Over the past year and a half, the Office of State Planning has been involved in a "Communities of Learning" initiative. This effort has aimed at helping

Involving community members is key to the planning and creation of community schools. These stakeholders shown here are taking part in a planning session for the new Belmont Runyon School in Newark, generating ideas on how to include community facilities with educational facilities.

to overcome these obstacles by educating the public—including public officials—about the tremendous and limited window of opportunity New Jersey residents have to leverage the state's investment in schools to serve as a catalyst for community development.

This is accomplished by creating schools that serve as centers of communities.

The office's initiative operates at several levels. It has included convening a series of meetings to build a consensus for the community-based school agenda among policy makers, the educational community and civic leaders.

It has also included outreach and technical assistance to enhance efforts under way to link school-facility planning with redevelopment initiatives. And it has included forging partnerships that join the resources of area planning and design faculty and students with local officials, school leaders and community groups to investigate creative approaches, and generate and test new ideas.

One source of funding for municipalities interested in creating new approaches to community learning is the Smart Growth Planning Grant Program, administered by the Department of Community Affairs in conjunction with the Office of State Planning.

The program has been funded with an annual appropriation of $3 million in two consecutive fiscal years.

To further target this planning assistance, Community Affairs Commissioner Jane M. Kenny in August 2000 announced the Community Schools Planning Grant program.

Community schools are "hubs of learning where schools and community organizations partner with youth, families and community residents to offer a range of support and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities, before, during and after school, seven days a week, all year long."

—The Coalition for Community Schools

Earlier this year, six communities were awarded grants total nearly $300,000. Camden, Long Branch, Neptune, Plainfield and Pleasantville were each awarded $50,000, while Vineland received $46,500.

The 14 municipalities that are designated as the Governor's Urban Coordinating Council (UCC) neighborhoods and that are also deemed "special needs districts" under *Abbott* were eligible to apply.

The UCC is a policy group whose mission includes improving the level of assistance by state agencies and working with residents of New Jersey's cities to create and implement neighborhood-based plans for revitalization. Various state agencies are providing funding and assistance to projects and programs included in these plans.

Staff of the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority and the many state departments and agencies that comprise the UCC are helping neighborhoods rebuild themselves through the creation of programs, houses, jobs and parks.

This renovated historic high school in Perth Amboy has a modernized interior while at the same time it preserves the historic architectural façade and interior details.

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The purpose of the Community Schools Planning Grants program is to promote cooperation among municipal officials, education officials, community groups and local residents to coordinate planning for new school facilities with inclusive neighborhood planning.

The key to a successful plan is the dialogue that must take place between residents and school and municipal personnel.

For this reason, the grant requires resolutions from both the municipal governing body and the local board of education as well as a description of how local residents will be brought into the planning process.

A National Issue

Like those in New Jersey, communities nationwide are struggling to address critical needs to repair, replace and build new schools, as the number of school-age children grows, and the nation's inventory of school buildings ages and wears out.

The U.S. Department of Education has articulated six critical reform dimensions which have implications for the planning and design of educational facilities:

- Integration of academic and vocational curriculum
- Internships/work-based learning
- Link between high schools and post-secondary institutions
- Adult meeting programs
- Career exploration
- Supportive learning environments within schools

There are currently about 1.3 million children enrolled in New Jersey's public schools and the school population increases each year, according to Peter Peretzman, spokesman for the state education department.

To meet the challenge of providing adequate school facilities, the education reform movement has advocated a series of new ideas.

There is also a growing consensus concerning the imperative to build in an environmentally sustainable manner, as part of society's responsibility to safeguard the world that future generations of citizens will inherit.

And national and local educational leaders have recommended planning schools as centers of community.

To guide states and local districts in their efforts to literally reinvent their educational infrastructure—and build more equitable, effective, and environmentally sustainable systems—the federal Department of Education in the summer of 1998 convened a group of architects, planners, school board members, teachers and representatives from federal agencies to discuss issues concerning the learning environments of the future.

This group endorsed the idea of schools that serve as centers of community—community learning centers—an approach that brings the community more into the school and the school into the community by expanding the usage of and access to the school through initiatives such as after-school, evening, and weekend activities and programs.

While this approach makes sense in suburban and rural as well as urban communities, it is particularly valuable in impoverished districts, where the school is the hub for community support systems.

Role of Design

The idea of community schools has a long history in our culture.

It evolved within and around the settlement house movement in the late 19th century, which was inseparable from the Arts and Crafts movement. This was a time when progressives hoped to use

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design as a lever to reform society and build the ideal democratic community, based on cooperation. John Dewey's pioneering work at the University of Chicago and the founding of the Dewey School, which was child-centered and focused on learning-by-doing, took place in this context.

In other words, design has been an integral component of the concept of community schools as a vital institution of civic society.

However, by the mid-20th century, trends toward specialization resulted in growing separation not only between schools and their communities but also between architects and planners. At the same time, the units of government responsible for community resources such as housing, education, health, transportation, recreational, and cultural facilities, were growing further apart.

A holistic understanding of communities—including an appreciation of the importance of design in daily life—survived as a counter trend evident today in widespread support for the idea of "livable" or "healthy" cities.

In fact, the community-schools movement can be understood as part of an international trend whereby a number of foundations, organizations and institutions have become increasingly focused on finding ways to strengthen families and nurture healthier communities.

National Design Policy

The emerging bipartisan consensus on national education policy and livable communities reflects this trend.

Notably, the forum on Design of Schools as Centers of Community, convened in October 1998 by the federal education department, generated a widely endorsed set of national design principles and published as *Schools as Centers of Community: A Citizen's Guide for Planning and Design.*

The authors of the Citizen's Guide explain that it "is intended as a compass to point the way, not a cookbook-style recipe."

The following design guidelines are not prescriptive, but rather, provide a framework for a process of discovery—an exploration of new possibilities—as well as for investigation of the new issues and problems that might arise in realizing alternative visions.

To meet the nation's needs for the 21st century, learning environments must:

1. Enhance teaching and learning and accommodate the needs of all learners.
2. Serve as centers of community.
3. Result from a planning/design process involving all stakeholders.
4. Provide for health, safety and security.
5. Make effective use of all available resources.
6. Allow for flexibility and adapt to changing needs.

These design principles reflect the understanding that there are two ways a school can serve as a center of community: "either by serving a more integral role within the context of the whole community, or by extending the learning environment to take advantage of the full range of the community's resources. Indeed, the most successful schools of the future will be integrated learning communities, which accommodate the needs of all of the community's stakeholders."

These principles have been endorsed by the American Institute of Architects, the American Association of School Administrators, and other national and international organizations.

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The Citizen's Guide offers the six guidelines listed below for design as a process of investigation—and exploration of new possibilities, as well as discovery of new issues and problems that might arise.

The following discussion focuses on these design principles as a framework for investigating how New Jersey's investment in new and improved school facilities might lead to better neighborhoods and better community-based learning centers.

Design Guidelines for Creating Schools That Serve as Centers of New Jersey Communities

1. Enhance teaching and learning and accommodate the needs of all learners.

Most of the public school facilities in America were designed for large-group, teacher-centered instruction occurring in isolated classrooms. However current knowledge and research about learning calls for new models characterized by more active student involvement, supported by strategies such as cooperative, project-based and interdisciplinary learning. A variety of classroom configurations are required to facilitate current best practices in education, such as collaborative problem solving.

Although there is a profusion of theories and research about how to enhance teaching and learning, and many new ideas about what constitutes an effective learning environment, there seems to be "an emerging consensus that smaller size is an essential condition of an effective school," according to Jeanne S. Frankel, in "Advocacy and Architecture" in *New Schools for New York.*

There are several strategies for creating smaller learning environments in existing large schools, including limiting class size, and subdividing units within existing large schools, creating "mini-schools," academies, charters or "house plans."

Bayonne High School, which houses a student population of 2,050 in grades 9 through 12, offers a good example of how subdivision works. Each student is assigned to one of five heterogeneous "houses."

Students benefit from the intimacy of a small group while still having access to the programs, facilities and resources of a large institution.

Students may also spend part of each school day in their "home" division, each of which is staffed with its own vice principal, guidance counselors and secretary, as well as the assigned faculty members.

To ensure even more continuity, students maintain the same counselor, homeroom, and homeroom teacher for all of their four years.

Where new construction is an option, another strategy is to cap the overall size of schools.

As Frankel, executive director of the Public Education Association (PEA), a policy analysis and advocacy group, reports:

"In cities across the country and among the nation's most exciting educational leaders—exemplified by Deborah Meier, the founder and principal of the Central Park East Schools (in)... New York, and Ted Sizer, the former dean of the Harvard School of Education, founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools, and author of a leading study of American high schools... the conviction that schools must be smaller is flourishing."

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In 1989, the Public Education Association joined with the Architectural League in sponsoring an influential design study: New Schools for New York. It generated many innovative ideas and designs that may be adapted to New Jersey's urban and older suburban areas where land is scarce.

This old school building in Perth Amboy illustrates the opportunity to preserve an architecturally distinctive facility that is conveniently located to downtown neighborhoods.

As Rosalie Genevro, executive director of the Architectural League, explained in *New Schools for New York*:

"The aim of New Schools for New York was "to illustrate with specific designs how [to] build schools small enough to meet contemporary criteria for an effective learning environment and how those small schools might be closely integrated with their communities...

"Our premise was that it would be possible to build many small schools if ingenious and innovative approaches toward using the existing built fabric of the city were adopted, along with a willingness to make judgments based on an evaluation of the overall quality of a facility rather than its adherence to myriad individual standards.

"Accordingly the League and PEA developed six architectural and educational programs that would test the feasibility of a creative 'urban opportunism,' [to take creative advantage of small sites, existing buildings and general development activity.]"

Architects were then invited to design actual school buildings that responded to the programs.

To complement the design investigation, PEA investigated how to build *affordable* small schools.

This investigation identified several opportunities for potential cost savings achieved by adopting a "flexible strategy, one which takes advantage of potential savings associated with the interface between the opportunities a neighborhood affords for cost-effective building and its combination of educational and community needs."

Opportunities for cost savings include:

- Using smaller sites
- Renovation of an abandoned or underutilized building
- Collaboration with other public agencies to incorporate smaller schools in multi-use facilities
- Integration with private or public sector construction or renovation projects (for example, including a school in a commercial office building, or negotiating with a developer to incorporate a school in the construction or renovation of low-rise housing.)

The PEA refers to such ad hoc, flexible strategies as "urban opportunism."

A good source of models of urban opportunism is the charter school movement. In New Jersey charter schools have to live within frugal facilities budgets, by taking advantage of small sites, existing buildings, and general development activity.

For example, students enrolled at the Hoboken Charter, which is housed in vacant space in an existing school, go to the local Y for their gym classes.

Having outgrown its current home, the Hoboken Charter School is now considering several options: renovating a Boys and Girls Club; accepting a developer's offer of space in a proposed housing project; or leasing a barge, to be moored at one of the new waterfront developments in town.

The barge idea may have seemed far-fetched to some, until the Neptune Foundation of New York agreed to finance construction of a public swimming pool on a barge in Hoboken.

In rural and suburban New Jersey, an additional advantage of building new small schools is to help contain sprawl, by reducing the pressure to develop "mall-sized schools" outside town—anonymous buildings surrounded by a sea of giant, asphalt parking lots and big athletic fields.

Some observers, including officials of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, blame excessive school acreage requirements which force schools away from the center of a community as a primary obstacle to community-centered schools as well as one of the prime driving forces perpetuating sprawl.

Renovation of existing schools and the retention of smaller schools in existing neighborhoods that are within walking distance for students not only retains the school as a central civic institution, but also includes opportunities to reduce dependence on vehicular transportation—both school buses and parent car-pools.

Besides that, parking lots add to New Jersey's non-point source water pollution because they are impervious surfaces. Rain water cannot percolate back into the earth and runs off quickly into storm drains, picking up pollutants in the process.

2. *Serve as centers of community*

Today's education facilities should be designed to sustain the integral relationship between a school and its community. There should be spaces that can be used for early learning and adult education; where learning occurs "after hours," at night and on weekends; where partnerships between schools, with businesses and with institutions of higher education are encouraged. Schools should also serve a variety of community needs in partnership with a wide spectrum of public, civic and private organizations. Their locations should encourage community use and their shared public spaces should be accessible day and night, year round.

The movement that seeks to design schools to serve as centers of community is based on the curriculum concept of Community Education, which offers local residents and local agencies and institutions the opportunity to become active partners in providing educational opportunities and addressing community concerns.

The Coalition for Community Schools explains: "A community school is both a set of partnerships and a place where services, supports and opportunities lead to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities."

To achieve these goals, most community schools work towards linking educational and cultural programs, recreation, job training, community improvement and service activities. These linked activities may be housed in a single building, a cluster of adjacent facilities or a decentralized network of sites.

There is already a substantial institutional support for community schools in New Jersey.

New Jersey's School Based Youth Services Program (SBYSP), developed by the Department of Human Services in 1987, was the first major state program in the nation that gave grants to community agencies to link education and human services, health and employment systems.

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The "one-stop" program has been initiated by schools and community agency partners in 30 school districts.

Each site provides health care, mental health and family counseling, job and employment training and substance abuse counseling. Many sites provide additional services including teen parenting education, day care, transportation, tutoring, family planning and hot lines. Programs operate before, during and after school and during the summer; some are open on weekends.

New Jersey's School Based Youth Services Program has won national acclaim, and has now been replicated in Iowa and Kentucky.

Plainfield is a good example of a community that is taking advantage of New Jersey's School Based Youth Services Program to move towards the creation of community schools.

The Plainfield Board of Education established its first school-based project in Stillman Elementary School in 1997, in partnership with the nonprofit organization Communities in Schools (CIS) and Managed Healthcare Systems, with a local service provider group called the Plainfield Coalition serving as an advisory council.

Children enjoy learning in a newly remodeled former industrial space that has been converted for early childhood education in Paterson.

This served as the basis for a district-wide plan, Plainfield's Promise, based on the national initiative America's Promise—a comprehensive service-delivery initiative to revolutionize the way in which the school-based and community-based services are delivered to its at-risk youth and their families.

Local support for Plainfield Superintendent Larry Leverett's vision for community schools was so strong, voters approved a bond issue to redesign the Washington Elementary School with the needs of the community in mind—even before *Abbott* funds became available.

Construction of the "educational" portion of the Washington School is complete, and the state Economic Development Authority is working with the Plainfield Public Schools to find money to build the rest.

Leverett is currently leading an effort, supported by Community Schools Planning Grant, to apply lessons learned from the Washington School planning process in developing a model for ensuring community participation in the planning for the rest of the schools to be built or rehabbed in Plainfield with *Abbott* funds.

This is being done in coordination with this city's redevelopment initiatives, which the Department of Community Affairs supports through the award of a Smart Growth Planning Grant.

Clearly, with the launching of the school construction program, New Jersey has the opportunity to continue to lead the nation by building the physical infrastructure needed to support innovative public-private partnerships such as school-based service delivery systems.

Notably, the first new school to be built with *Abbott* funds in Newark, the Belmont Runyon Elementary School, in the Clinton Hill neighborhood, will be a community school with specially designed facilities to house the social services components of the program.

Economic Development Authority officials currently are working with the Newark Public School Board to find financing for those portions of the project that will not be eligible for *Abbott* construction funds.

The design and construction of this school has also served as a catalyst for the formation of a coalition. This coalition will undertake inclusive neighborhood-based planning to integrate the new school with the millions of dollars of public and private housing, transportation improvements, economic development projects, and social service initiatives targeted for the area.

Federal funding is available to leverage the state's investment in such community school facilities, through the Department of Education's 21st Century Schools program, which supports after-school programs, and the Health and Human Services' Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities program, which helps establish school-based health centers.

3. Result from a planning/design process involving all stakeholders

Schools should be planned by a representative group of the people who will use them, including educators, parents, students and representatives from community, civic and business organizations. To ensure widespread, fully informed, critical participation of all stakeholder groups in designing learning environments, adequate time and resources must be allocated to this process.

In crafting the Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act, New Jersey lawmakers recognized that the location of school facilities in the context of the communities which they serve is important to both the educational success of the schools and the development of those communities.

Legislators agreed that it makes sense to integrate the planning and construction of schools, where possible, into the economic and community development efforts of local governments and community redevelopment entitites. Doing so promotes more effective and efficient use of land, resources and expertise and better assures the future viability of local neighborhoods and communities, especially in urban areas.

Thus, the legislation, in Section 4, subsection (g) mandates that:

"Each district shall submit the long-range facilities plan to the planning board of the municipality or municipalities in which the district is situate for the planning board's review and findings."

Moreover, the legislation amends Section 22 of P.L.1975, c.291 (C.40:55D-31) to read as follows:

"The planning board shall review and issue findings concerning any long-range facilities plan submitted to the board pursuant to the 'Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act' for the purpose of review of the extent to which the long-range facilities plan is informed by, and consistent with, at least the land use plan element and the housing element contained within the municipal master plan adopted pursuant to section 19 of P.L. 1975 c.291 (C.40:55D-28) and such other elements of the municipal master plan as the planning board deems necessary to determine whether the prospective sites for school facilities contained in the long range facilities plan promote more effective and efficient coordination of school construction with the development efforts of the municipality.

"The board shall devote at least one full meeting of the board to presentation and review of the long-range facilities plan prior to adoption of a resolution setting forth the board's findings."

The municipal government has a crucial leadership function to play in the task of harmonizing school facility and municipal master plans, but this effort should focus on incorporating neighborhood-based strategies developed in cooperation with community leaders.

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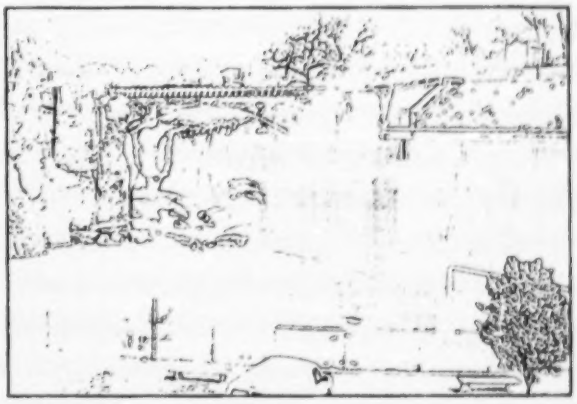
Paterson: City of Learning

One innovative strategy for sustaining the relationship between a school and its community is to distribute and network smaller sub-units of the school throughout the neighborhood in both new and existing sites. This approach has the advantage of dissolving some of the traditional barriers between school and life and school and community.

In Paterson, a city where vacant land is scarce but vacant buildings are plentiful, Schools Superintendent Edwin Duroy has begun to do just this by creating small, specialized learning academies, housed in sites scattered throughout the downtown.

For instance, there is a leadership academy operating within a high school. The Academy of Fine Arts occupies the former St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church. An academy for international studies and languages has opened in an old synagogue.



The historic Great Falls in Paterson stands as an example of a local resource available to be linked with educational facilities planning in the community.

The second floor of an under-utilized, downtown shopping plaza serves as home for two academies. They are the Health and Related Professions Academy (HARP), which serves 125 students and was relocated from Eastside High School, and the new, 25-student Metro Paterson Academy for Communications and Technology (MPACT). It has a special focus on urban planning and design.

Lucent Technologies has opened a national training center within MPACT's space, providing students with access to Lucent facilities and staff for learning and career opportunities.

Duroy's urban academies project took shape with the help of H. Roy Strickland, a professor of architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge and director of the New American School Design Project there.

After taking more than 20 proposals from the community, the district announced that it would establish seven "innovative academies" by 2001.

Duroy hired Strickland to help find sites for the career-based academies.

The MIT team then came up with a plan they call "The City of Learning," a creative effort to link schools, neighborhoods and resources. This plan states:

"As a city of learning, Paterson will exploit its social, economic, and physical resources (and those of its surrounding region) for learning by both children and adults; leverage learning and technology as economic development tools; renovate and build schools as multi-use centers for neighborhood revitalization; and empower Paterson's people to become the city's technologists, conservationists, planners, and entrepreneurs while they learn."

Strickland and his colleagues aimed for nothing less than to make Paterson a model for nation's urban education systems.

A core concept of the City of Learning plan is the use of empty upper floors of downtown buildings to house schools, teachers and educational resource centers, essentially turning the downtown into a decentralized campus. The first floors of these buildings could house businesses that serve as a training ground for students.

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Paterson: City of Learning (continued)

For example, the plan calls for transforming one empty building into a school of culinary arts, where students might actually run a ground-floor restaurant.

A pathway signaled by distinctive lighting, banners and paving would link the various academies. A parking lot in front of the church-cum-arts academy would be transformed into a new civic plaza complete with trees and fountains.

The mingling of students, teachers, workers, and shoppers along the pedestrian paths and in the plaza, would surely breathe new life into the heart of this historic industrial city.

The City of Learning's linked, decentralized campus also provides an opportunity to coordinate schools and neighborhood resources.

As Strickland explained to city officials, "We looked at the whole town for its learning opportunities and figured out how the new facilities could be matched with learning programs."

For example, the HARP academy would incorporate experiential learning in at nearby St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center. There are numerous possibilities for creating theme schools that tap the distinct qualities of the city.

A proposed school in the Great Falls Historic District would emphasize preservation. One near the Passaic River could focus on environmental studies. The international school could be tied into an international trade zone, a concept pushed by Mayor Martin Barnes.

By encouraging teachers to develop these academies that offer specialized curricula and smaller classes, Duroy acknowledges he is essentially replicating the success of the charter school idea within the system.

"The most important concept here is that we're bringing choice to parents and the community" he stated in an interview.

Charter schools and Paterson's urban academies are the right scale for experimentation —and for both, necessity has been the mother of invention. Like charter schools, the academies had to "find" affordable spaces to occupy, and were able to fit into what was available. Unlike charter schools, however, Duroy's adaptive reuse facilities plan is eligible for state support through the new construction program.

The planning effort should be based on a clear picture of current conditions within the district and community, for example, by agreeing on a common set of demographic forecasts.

Another important task is to establish a process for site selection that maximizes the achievement of other municipal goals of economic, social, cultural development and environmental protection.

In urban communities this is particularly important since many of the sites available for schools may also be brownfields, designated by the city for reclamation for economic development projects. Brownfields are underutilized industrial sites or properties that are, or are suspected to be, contaminated. They can include anything from a corner gas station to a defunct factory.

The success of this effort hinges on recognition that the integration of school planning with municipal planning does not compromise the independence of the school district in determining educational content.

The Department of Community Affairs initiated the Community Schools Planning Grant Program to serve as a catalyst for collaborative and inclusive neighborhood planning, that when implemented at the local level, would result in better schools and better communities.

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The key to a successful plan is the dialogue that must take place between stakeholders, students, parents, school and municipal personnel about what kinds of schools they want and what their neighborhoods need.

Ideally, the Community School Planning process will be guided by a steering committee that includes representatives of all of these groups.

By translating community input into the program for the school, the design team can tailor a plan to complement rather than duplicate a neighborhood's existing amenities.

But there is no formula for collaborative planning or easy way to engage all stakeholders. There must be diverse opportunities for talking about projects. It may be necessary for an extended round of presentations to explain to educators and parents the range of choices inherent in the planning and design process, and to familiarize municipal planners with the constraints that govern school building.

4. Provide for health, safety and security

While we want to create learning environments that are open and inviting to the larger community, at the same time they need to be designed to promote the health, safety and security of students, staff and community users. At the most basic level, school designs need to address environmental safeguards and meet all safety codes. Beyond this they should incorporate physical features which enhance safety, such as carefully considered traffic patterns; and they should eliminate features which add to the potential for violence and crime, such as poorly lit and obscured places.

Health and safety concerns are the top priority for all state-funded school facility projects.

As a result of the *Abbott* legislation, beginning in the 1999–2000 school year, each district must prepare and submit to the commissioner of the Department of Education a long-term facilities plan that details the district's school facilities needs and the district's plan to address those needs for the ensuing five years. As stated in the bill:

The long-range facilities plan shall include an educational adequacy inventory of all existing school facilities in the district, the identification of all deficiencies in the district's current inventory of school facilities, which includes the identification of those deficiencies that involve emergent health and safety concerns, and the district's proposed plan for future construction and renovation.

The commissioner then establishes, in consultation with the *Abbott* districts, a priority ranking of all school facilities projects, in terms of critical need, in which health and safety concerns are the most critical.

In addition, the legislation also directs the commissioner to study, by July 1, 2001, the Safe Schools Design Guidelines, prepared by the Florida Center for Community Design and Research in 1993.

Based upon the commissioner's study of these guidelines, which illustrate recommendations founded on principles and strategies of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, the commissioner will issue recommendations to districts on the appropriateness of including these principles in the design and construction of school facilities projects in New Jersey.

A copy of the Florida Safe Schools Design Guidelines, is available to be downloaded at http://www.fccder.usf.edu/Projects/safeschl.html.

Most student violence occurs between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Thus, while the design of the physical environment can affect the incident rate of crime, perhaps the most effective way to address student safety is to provide for a wide range of after-school programs.

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A good way to accomplish this is by connecting schools to community networks. "Safe Schools/Healthy Students," a joint effort of the US Department of Justice and Health and Human Services (HHS), promotes this community-wide approach to preventing violence, decreasing drug use and giving youth more options about how to have healthier lives.

Pilot programs are under way in Boston, St. Louis and Washington, D.C.

A similar effort is under way in four school buildings in Trenton, as part of the Weed and Seed program, which is a comprehensive approach to law enforcement and community revitalization.

The program attempts to first, weed out violent crime, gang activity and drug use and trafficking in target areas, and then seed the target area with a wide range of social services.

As part of the Trenton Weed and Seed program, four Safe Haven schools provide after-school and summer activities for children and adults. These schools serve as insulated community meeting places.

In addition to a wide range of educational and recreational programs for youth, the Safe Haven schools offer adult educational workshops in financial management, tax preparation, parenting education and stress management.

In recognition of the need to improve conditions that affect the safety of children that walk or bicycle to and from school, the State of Florida has also created the Safe Ways to School Program, which is administered by the state's Traffic and Bicycle Safety Education Program, through the University of Florida, Department of Urban and Regional Planning. The project is committed to helping reduce traffic speed and congestion around schools, and to increase the number of children who walk or bicycle to school. Significantly, the project involves conducting a school site design analysis and a neighborhood site assessment to determine the conditions of street traffic, parent and bus drop-off locations, sidewalks, crossing, and the overall safety of existing routes to school.

Trenton now has an unprecedented opportunity to use *Abbott* funds to design new school buildings and grounds to support the kinds of after hours use provided by the Weed and Seed program, to improve the well being of the community.

5. Make effective use of all available resources

School buildings should be designed to maximize the impact of the physical environment on learning, as well as to maximize the use of renewable energy resources. Where possible the design process should emphasize preservation and renovation over new construction. School designs must also encourage the interface of learning and its application in the workplace. Finally, the facilities designed to support public education must be developed within economic limits that can be sustained by future generations.

This guideline falls under the more general concept of sustainable design. That is "a strategy that works towards a whole building design that balances the total impact of facilities on the environment and community," writes Jonathan Weiss of HEERY International, the firm advising the state Economic Development Authority on how to organize the school construction and finance program.

"Sustainable schools represent an integrated design of the educational program and the school facility that responds to the economic, environmental and social needs of a community," according to Weiss.

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To borrow a phrase from Weiss, the new school-financing law "provides an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate the economic viability of sustainable facilities and the importance of long-term thinking in design and construction programs."

Key Components of Sustainable School Design

- Environmentally sensitive site planning and landscape design;
- Incorporation of day-lighting in conjunction with energy efficient lighting and electrical systems;
- Design of an energy efficient building shell and mechanical and ventilation systems;
- Employment of viable solar technologies;
- Consideration of the life-cycle energy and environmental impacts of products, materials and processes;
- Use of natural ventilation strategies and avoidance of physical, biological and chemical sources of potentially harmful contaminants;
- Use of water conservation strategies;
- Systems and standards for reducing waste and recycling;
- Convenient connections to transit, safe bicycle paths, and pedestrian friendly walkways;
- Generally, design of the school as a teaching tool for sustainability.
- Design of facility for future adaptive reuse;
- Design of school recreational facilities for joint use by the community.

Opportunities for expanded and alternative use of K–12 school buildings:

- Cultural and social
- Youth activities including day care
- Resource use and information dissemination
- Health, leisure and recreation
- Adult learning

A good resource for districts interested in sustainable design is the New Jersey Sustainable Schools Network, a consortium of schools and a wide variety of organizations committed to promoting education for a sustainable future in schools in New Jersey.

"In a sustainable school, students—and everyone else—will see the intellectual concern for a sustainable future mirrored in the practical decisions in the cafeteria, during construction or renovations, in the inclusion of students and custodial staff in energy efficiency training and initiatives, in transportation policies and in the design and maintenance of school yards, etc." according to the network.

Another source of information on sustainable design for the state's school districts is the New Jersey Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability (NJHEPS), which includes among its goals serving as a catalyst for sustainability efforts by the K–12 system.

There are many programs available to school districts interested in ways to incorporate energy conserving and environmentally "friendly" features in learning environments.

Notably, the Green Schools program, designed for K–12 schools, creates energy awareness, enhances experiential learning, and saves schools money on energy costs.

The Alliance to Save Energy—a nonprofit coalition of business, government, environmental and consumer groups—created Green Schools "in response to the concerns that schools are under-retrofitted compared to other building types" and "to educate our next generation about the importance of energy issues."

Based on the success of the pilot, the Alliance resolved to facilitate the formation of partnerships and programs tailored to the particular needs of schools.

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In New Jersey, those needs could include expanding new construction or renovation projects beyond the scope of work eligible for state funding.

Districts looking for opportunities to renovate and preserve rather than build new facilities may now look at historic neighborhood schools, both existing and decommissioned, with renewed appreciation.

One sign of the value of some older school buildings is the extent to which these fine structures have been converted to residential uses. Quality materials, sturdy construction, distinctive architectural character and convenient neighborhood locations are among the features to be found in many old schools.

New Jersey's landmark Uniform Construction Code's Rehabilitation Subcode—created under the leadership of Commissioner Kenny and administered by the Department of Community Affairs' Division of Codes and Standards—makes it easier and less costly to renovate historic buildings, including schools, while still ensuring safety.

Adaptive reuse of other building types should also be considered because of the potential for blending academic and vocational programs in actual workplace settings.

For example, the addition of a school to the mix of uses in a larger building offers both advantage of streamlined building operations and the exposure of students to potential role models, mentors and career paths.

6. Allow for flexibility and adaptability to changing needs.

The designers of learning environments need to remain open to a whole array of ideas.

Conventional wisdom holds that any building can be a school, that is because a school is a set of relationships—a community of learners.

Moreover, "as we expand our knowledge of how we learn, we also must expand our concept of what constitutes a stimulating and creative learning environment," note educational researchers Bruce Jilk and George Copa.

As the previous design guidelines and examples indicate, the growing emphasis on integration and inclusion in education today extend the traditional K–12 program to include the community as part of the learning environment.

The designers of new educational facilities must think outside of the box of the "school house" to allow for linkages not only between public schools and neighborhood resources and the work place, but also between K–12 schools and institutions of higher education—and through the Internet, the world.

An excellent model for this sort of integrated educational system is the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC), a collaborative project with the University of Pennsylvania.

WEPIC's mission is to build university-assisted community schools, designed to revitalize both school curricula and local neighborhoods through community-oriented, real-world problem solving. Activities are focused upon areas chosen by each school's principal, staff, students and local residents.

Students learn not only by doing, but also learn by and for service. The idea behind this approach is that schools can function as the strategic and catalytic agents for community transformation. The program is coordinated by the West Philadelphia Partnership, a mediating organization composed of institutions (including the University of Pennsylvania) and community groups. Other partners include the school district, unions, churches, and city, state and federal agencies and departments.

One example of creative adaptive reuse of existing buildings for a new high school that melds the best of technical and academic training is the Marine Academy of Science and Technology, or MAST.

Located on the grounds of Gateway National Park in Sandy Hook, NJ, MAST classrooms occupy 13 newly renovated buildings that once served as a U.S. Army base.

MAST is a science and technology statewide magnet school in the Monmouth County Vocational School District, which has been recognized for its innovative programs and practices by the U.S. Department of Education's office of vocational and adult education as an example of the New American High School.

MAST has partnerships with the U.S. Navy, the Coast Guard, the National Park Service and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, which has a state-of-the-art lab on the campus where high school seniors work on research projects with scientists.

It also has a floating classroom, the vessel Blue Sea, which offers students "real-world" experience to prepare them for careers in the field of marine-technology.

"MAST was initially designed to offer students either a marine-science or a marine-trades program, but instructors found that the distinction was creating a divide between "tech kids" and "trade kids" according to Paul J. Christopher, the school's principal.

All students are now enrolled in a marine environmental-technology program, which integrates biology, computer applications, and systems technology.

"When you take them out of the traditional classroom environment and let them go, it is amazing what they will do," Pete Murdoch, a teacher at the school, said in an interview as he watched members of the Coast Guard test boats his students made for a regatta.

A national foundation has awarded a grant for replicating this university-school partnership in several other cities.

A core component of the model is the type of university-community partnership fostered by HUD's Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) program. So far, there are three COPC programs in New Jersey—in Camden, sponsored by The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey; in Newark, sponsored by Rutgers University; and in Elizabeth, sponsored by Kean University—that could serve as a foundation for replicating this model.

While it is impossible to predict what the school of the future will look like, one thing seems certain: schools will become more and more like communities—at various scales of community from the local to the global—and communities will become more like schools—sites for life-long learning.

Abbott funds may serve as a catalyst for building portions of the facilities to support communities of learning, but the key ingredient for their success is a flexible and open minded approach—a willingness among the partnering agencies and institutions to rethink conventional methods and reconfigure established bureaucratic practices.

While new multi-agency collaborations offer new possibilities for cost savings, increased productivity and more effective use of each agencies' efforts and resources, it will not necessarily be easy to assess the associated costs and benefits.

However, maximizing this opportunity to reflect on a future vision for schools that serve as centers of community will facilitate the development of informed, pragmatic strategies.

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Conclusion

There is much to learn from the efforts to plan and design the new social and physical forms needed to support communities of learning already under way in many places throughout New Jersey and the nation.

Most important, perhaps, is the lesson that these efforts are not focused on how to build a better or more cost effective school building, but on how to build a better, more livable community.

There is a limited window of opportunity to come up with a vision for new schools that serve as centers for New Jersey communities. In a few years it will be too late to leverage the investment in schools through smarter, more efficient integrated resource development. While the need for investment and for innovative planning and design is greatest in New Jersey's urban communities, the payoff of such an investment can benefit every municipality, neighborhood and child in New Jersey.

Resources

New Jersey State Departments and Agencies

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Web site:
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Web site:
www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dhssby.html

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Resources (continued)

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Web site: www.njeda.com/njedaschools/

New Jersey Governor's Office

New Jersey School Construction Initiative
Donald T. DiFrancesco, Acting Governor
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State House
P.O. Box 001
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Web site: www.state.nj.us/governor/schools

New Jersey Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability
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Web site: www.state.nj.us/njra

Others

Green Schools
Alliance to Save Energy
1200 18th Street NW
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Fax: (202) 331-9588

Web site: www.ase.org

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Web site: www.tesc.edu

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The Education Law Center
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Web site: www.edlawcenter.org

Publications

National Trust for Historic Preservation
Historic Schools in the Age of Sprawl: Why Johnny Can't Walk to School

See: http://www.nationaltrust.org/main/abouttrust/schoolshome.htm

U.S. Department of Education
Centers of Community: A Citizen's Guide for Planning and Design

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